

American Bottom Conservancy • Arkansas Wildlife Federation  
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis • Biodiversity Project  
Center for Neighborhood Technology • Citizens Against Widening the Industrial Canal  
Committee on the Middle Fork Vermilion River • Delta Chapter Sierra Club  
Delta Waterfowl Foundation • Friends of the Kaw/Kansas Riverkeeper  
Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers • Great Rivers Environmental Law Center  
Gulf Restoration Network • Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Iowa Chapter Sierra Club • Iowa Environmental Council • Iowa Rivers Revival  
Jesus People Against Pollution • Kansas Natural Resource Council  
Kansas Wildlife Federation • Kentucky Resources Council  
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation • Louisiana Bucket Brigade  
Louisiana Environmental Action Network • Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper  
Lower Mississippi River Foundation • Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and  
Development • Mid South Fly Fishers • Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Minnesota Conservation Federation • Minnesota Division of Izaak Walton League of America •  
Minnesota Ornithologists' Union • Mississippi Chapter of the Sierra Club  
Mississippi River Corridor • Mississippi River Fund • Missouri Coalition for the Environment  
Missouri River Initiative of Izaak Walton League of America  
Missouri River Waterfowlers Association • Open Space Council • Prairie Rivers Network  
South Dakota Wildlife Federation • Tennessee Clean Water Network  
Wolf River Conservancy • Yell County Wildlife Federation

June 22, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: River Communities Need a New Approach to Water Resources Planning

Dear President Obama:

The 44 undersigned organizations from states bordering the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers call on your Administration to chart a new path forward for the nation's river communities through fundamental changes to the water resources planning principles and guidelines (the P&G). The P&G, which are currently being revised by your Administration, should require that federal investments in water resources protect and restore the natural flood fighting defenses of the nation's rivers and wetlands.

Communities throughout the Mississippi and Missouri River basins are once again facing record floods that are destroying homes and businesses, and causing enormous suffering. These floods will add to a long history of economic burdens created by poor federal water planning in this region of the country. For example, flawed federal projects were the primary cause of the massive flooding and devastation

of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Flawed federal projects increased the crest of the Great Midwest Flood of 1993, which was the costliest U.S. river flood in history causing damages totaling \$23 billion. Flawed federal projects continue to contribute to the destruction of more than a football field of coastal Louisiana wetlands each and every hour.

While there are many contributing factors to the current flooding, it is clear that federal water projects and federal river management have played a major role in increasing the severity of these and other floods across the country. Federal planning for the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers has produced poorly timed releases from upstream federal reservoirs that increase flood crests; levees that have raised flood heights by three to five feet while creating a false sense of safety; and thousands of river “training” structures designed to facilitate barge traffic that scientists estimate have raised flood levels by up to 15 feet in some locations. These and other federal projects have eliminated much of the natural flood fighting defenses provided by the rivers’ floodplains and delta wetlands at federal taxpayer expense.

While the problems created by these projects will not be solved overnight, they are reversible. A P&G that requires our federal agencies to protect and restore the natural flood fighting defenses of the nation’s rivers and wetlands would provide a vital tool for improving the health, safety, and well being of river communities for generations to come. To help achieve these goals, the new P&G should:

- Require that new federal water projects and investments protect and restore the floodplains and wetlands of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and their tributaries and distributaries, and of the nation’s other rivers and require that existing federal projects be managed to protect communities from floods;
- Require that federal planners take all steps possible to avoid and minimize adverse environmental impacts *and* recommend the use of less environmentally damaging alternatives, including nonstructural, water efficiency, and restoration approaches where practicable; and
- Require that federal investments in restoration, including restoration of the Mississippi River delta and Louisiana’s coastal wetlands, work to restore, enhance, and protect ecosystem functions and processes in order to improve ecosystem health, sustainability, and resiliency, and be cost-effective.

It is critical that the new P&G provide clear direction and criteria for future federal investments in water resources projects and require that the federal agencies follow those directions. A P&G that is merely advisory in nature cannot guarantee the change in the status quo approach to planning that the nation so desperately needs. Our organizations look forward to working with Administration

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officials over the coming months to implement these changes that are so essential for a safe and productive future.

Sincerely,

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cc:

Mr. William Daley, Chief of Staff

Ms. Nancy Ann DeParle, Deputy Chief of Staff

Mr. Pete Rouse, Senior Advisor

Mr. David Plouffe, Senior Advisor

The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality

The Honorable Jack Lew, Director of the Office of Management and Budget

The Honorable Cass Sunstein, Administrator, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs

The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior

The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture

The Honorable Gary Locke, Secretary of Commerce

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy, Army Assistant Secretary for Civil Works

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Undersecretary of Commerce

The Honorable W. Craig Fugate, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency

Mr. John Tubbs, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Department of the Interior

Mr. Rowan Gould, Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service